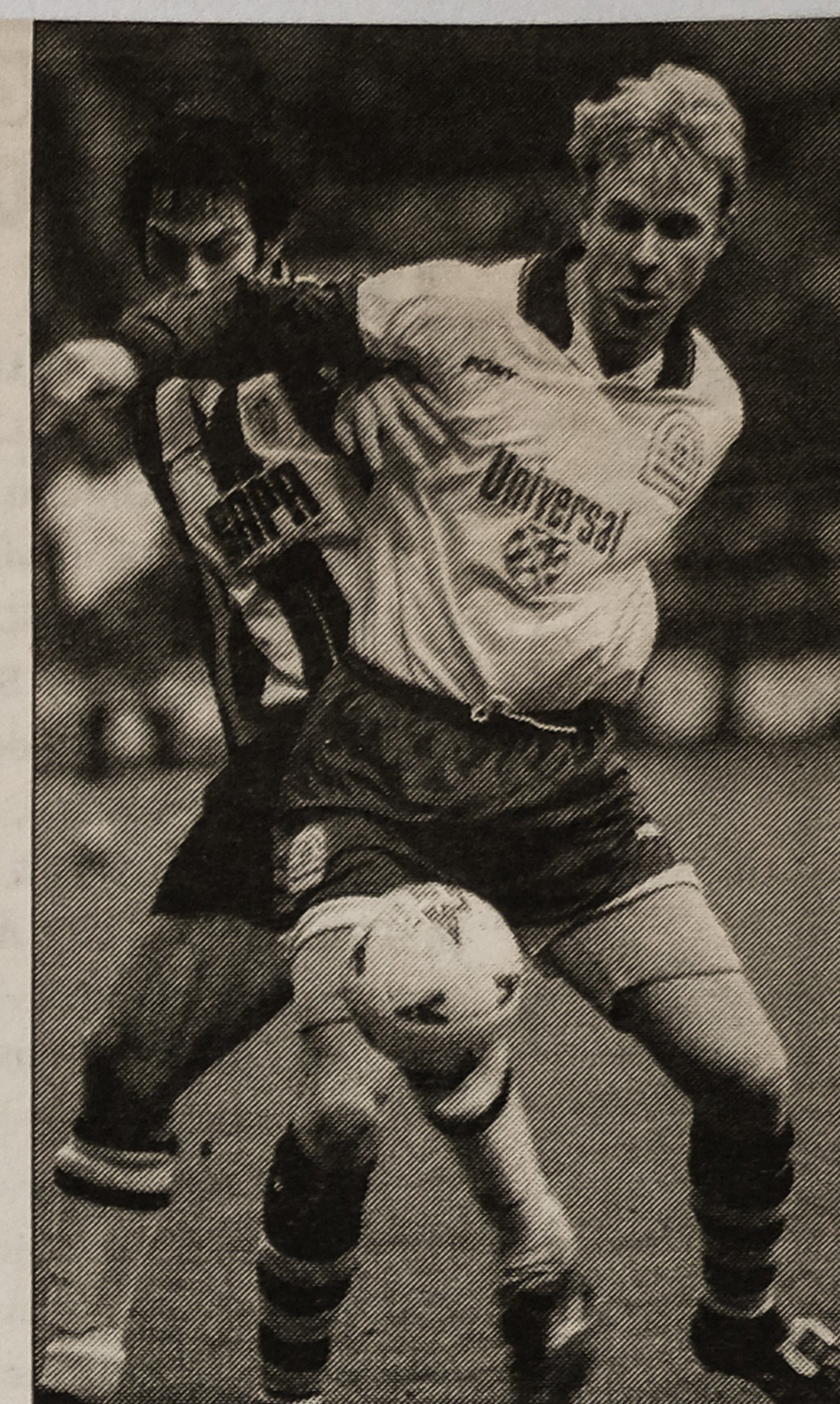




Celebrating - Ceri Hughes, Graham Alexander and Steve Davis



Graham Alexander blasts Luton into the lead in the dying minutes



David Oldfield in action

Alexander steals a late winner

Notts County 1 Luton 2
G R A H A M
A l e x a n d e r
plundered a late
winner to cast
himself as the
wicked Sheriff of
Nottingham.

With just three minutes remaining, the hard working midfielder crashed home a stunning 12 yard volley to seize the spoils for Luton and complete a rousing fightback.

But a clearer case of floodlight robbery you will not see with relegation threatened Notts County desperately unlucky not to take at least a point.

Hatters struggled to string two passes together in a poor

Report by
PETE KENYON

first half in which County set out their stall to frustrate first and foremost and hit on the break wherever possible.

Central defender Gary Strodder should have done better from a free kick, but after wrestling himself free inside the six yard box his close range header went high.

Centre forward Gary Jones was equally wasteful after Ian Baraclough's deep cross left him with a free header on goal.

And ten minutes before the break Jones again wasted a glorious opportunity for the home side - this time allowing Ian Feuer to snuff out the danger following an inch perfect Phil Robinson through ball which had left him in the clear.

By the time Alexander's dipping shot sailed over a stranded Darren Ward and on to the bar five minutes before the break Hatters should have been out of it.

But right on the hour County finally nosed ahead.

Robinson's pass across the 18 yard box caught Hatters' square back line crammed in the centre, and Ian Richardson outflanked them all to casually bring down the cross and stab home past the exposed Feuer.

New County manager Sam Allardyce immediately changed his formation into a more defensive one by making a

double substitution, but the ploy backfired horribly and Luton were level within a minute of the change.

For that Hatters can thank bungling County keeper Darren Ward.

There looked to be little danger when Ceri Hughes picked up the ball 35 yards out - and the kindest thing you can say about the long range effort that followed is that it was on target.

But Ward let the ball go right through him and Hatters were level.

Tony Thorpe then wasted the chance of the match -

somehow contriving to poke his shot wide after Hughes's 50 yard volley sent the division's sharpest shooter clean through into acres of space.

Steve Davis then had to launch himself into a desperate tackle to deny Tony Battersby, and even after Alexander's volleyed effort, battling County might still have got the draw they deserved if Battersby had shown a sharper eye for goal right at the death.

After the match Lennie Lawrence said: "The result was very harsh on Notts County and although I am pleased with

the result I have spoken to the players in the dressing room about the expectations that we have of ourselves as a result of being near the top.

"They got themselves in the game after we started brightly and it was not until the last 20 minutes that we started playing again".

Team: Feuer, James, Thomas, Linton (Marshall 68), Davis, Johnson, Hughes, Alexander, Oldfield, Thorpe (Grant 77), Guentchev. Sub not used: Patterson. Attendance 5025.